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Thesis

BLASCO IBANEZ, PROPAGANDIST

by

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In Valencia in the year 1867 was born a child who was destined to become a great fighter for the Republican cause in Spain. He was to be as bold and fearless with his pen as was the Cid with his sword. Blasco Ibáñez was headed for an exciting, adventurous life even from his childhood days. He was an intelligent boy but he would rather play games in which skill and dexterity were required than to read books. Even while so young he displayed a rebellious spirit against whatever implied method, order, system, or discipline. In these impetuous days of his youth one catches glimpses through his biographers of his great vigor. At the age of seventeen he disappeared from his Valencian home and lived and worked for a while in Madrid. The bad boy was taken home but later this rebellious spirit broke out again for it became not an uncommon sight to see Blasco Ibáñez before a Valencian street crowd stirring them up against conditions such as existed in Spain at the time. One of his first creative and lasting works was the founding of a daily newspaper, "El Pueblo", in Valencia. It was in the editorial rooms of this newspaper during the early hours of the morning that Blasco wrote his first books that made him famous as one of the greatest of Spain's regional novelists. His novels of Valencia, its customs and its people, put him in a class with Galdós, Pereda, Valdés, and Pardo Bazán, other masters of the Spanish regional novel. If



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he had been content to let these few novels be his contributions to art, or if he had continued to interpret the life of his province, his fame as a great contemporary writer would certainly have been secured. But something happened. Blasco began to travel. He left his Valencia and saw more of his Spain. This change was accompanied by a revolutionary change in his writing. One may wonder why this took place. Did he, as he wrote in a letter to his friend, Cejador y Fra^Uca, write his next series of novels, with sincerity and with good intentions to influence the people of his country to do something about bettering conditions? Or did he, according to his biographer, Camille Pitollet, discover that it was too dull to believe in art for art's sake? Did he really wish to lay bare the pitiful conditions of a shackled country in order to stir his countrymen to action, or did he simply wish to stir things up for the sake of stirring them up and win fame and fortune?

The fact is that turbulent days followed in the trail of the Valencian novels. Blasco denounced Spain's policy with regard to Cuba and he had to flee. He went to Italy where he wrote "En el País del Arte". Upon his return he was put in prison for a year. Later, while serving as a congressman for Valencia seven times in succession, he became known as a republican propagandist. After this he left politics and established a publishing house, F. Sempere and Co. Besides using this as a means of circulating his radical ideas he sold inexpensive trans-

lations of the works of Zola, Hugo, Gorki, Sudermann, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Sorel, and other great foreign writers.

Now that Blasco Ibáñez was free to devote his entire time to writing he produced, in the five years between 1903 and 1908, the five important novels of propaganda--"La Catedral, "El Intruso", "La Bodega, "La Horda", and "Sangre y Arena".

"La Catedral" is a savage attack on the church, the army, and the monarchy. The principal character, Gabriel Luna, born in the cathedral of Toledo of a family that had been employed in the cathedral for several generations, is enabled to study for the priesthood. While engrossed in this pursuit the revolution, which is to change his entire life, breaks out. After fighting for the "carlistas" he is exiled to France, in the capital city of which he begins to study. First he neglects theology, so interested is he in his new life; later he renounces it; and he ends by cursing it. He begins to dream of a social change and is seized with a desire to help better the condition of his fellow men. He becomes a champion of ideas that are rather anarchistic and it is not long before his name becomes famous throughout Europe as an ardent exponent of the "idea". As he is a convincing speaker, he soon becomes one of the leaders, his work taking him to distant parts of Europe. Finally, after an absence of many years, he returns to Spain to help his countrymen. At Barcelona he is seized in connection with a plot and thrown into prison where he languishes for several months. After being set free he decides to return

to the cathedral at Toledo to spend there in peace and solitude his few remaining days. By this time he is only too well known by the police everywhere throughout Europe and particularly Spain, and he is given no time to rest in peace. Suffering from consumption brought on by exposure, hunger, and ill-treatment, he seeks refuge in the cathedral, knowing that his brother will not refuse to take him in. For a time he lives unmolested and is as happy as his sick condition will permit. He prevails upon his brother to take back a niece who, after being betrayed by a man, is leading a miserable life in Madrid. Both victims of an "unjust social system", a mystic love binds them closer and closer. In the meantime, Gabriel, finding it impossible to desist from his bad practice of spreading propaganda, unconsciously influences the simple minds of the other employees in the cathedral, holding them entranced for an hour or two at a time by his obvious reasoning. Now although Gabriel is not of the bomb-throwing type of anarchists his disciples misinterpret his arguments. One night while performing his duties as night watchman, Gabriel is attacked and killed by his "compañeros", who have planned to rob the treasure of the cathedral.

Gabriel Luna is, in the opinion of some critics, mentally unbalanced. He has all the ideas of anarchists and communists and throughout the book he denounces religion and what he considers the backwardness of Spain. Luna struggles constantly to change the ideas of the average Spaniard who is represented by his brother Esteban.

"¿De qué te ha servido tanto leer periódicos y libros? ¿Para qué ese deseo de arreglar lo que está bien o si está mal no tiene arreglo posible? ¿De seguir tranquilamente tu camino serías beneficiado de la catedral, y quién sabe si te sentarías en el coro, entre los canónigos, para honra y amparo de la familia!...."¹

Esteban, then, is the type of person who never desires to do some real thinking. Things are good enough for him as they are. Furthermore, if things are not what they should be, why try to change them when that is impossible?

The following quotation shows Luna's attitude toward religion:

"La Catedral era para Gabriel un gigantesco tumor que hinchaba la epidermis española como rostro de antiguas enfermedades. Nada había que hacer allí. No era un músculo capaz de desarrollo: era un absceso que aguardaba la hora de ser extirpado o de disolverse por los gérmenes mortales que llevaba en su interior."²

And so all through the book the reader is overwhelmed with an immense amount of propaganda against the church which is represented as a cancer slowly eating out the vital organs of Spain.

If one attempted to reread "La Catedral" one would find it dull and uninteresting. The reader would be tempted to skip those pages in which the propaganda appears. Let us suppose that all those pages were eliminated from the book. Nothing would remain for there is no story. The plot, such as it is, appears in the first two chapters only. In the following chapters the story is suppressed for the sake of the propaganda. Luna simply lives in the cathedral

1. La Catedral, pp. 17 - 18

2. Ibid., p. 217.

and brings out all his anti-religious and anarchistic ideas.

Blasco does not regard the cathedral in the manner of an inspired poet. But he realizes its beauty and its splendor for here and there he does leave his trail of destruction and tell something about its grandeur. In the opening lines of the book the reader can visualize with the writer the cathedral as it appears at sunrise. Inside, he sees the slanting rays of the sun colored by the stained windows high above him. At night he experiences the solitude of the cool, dark interior. He sees the great columns, the paintings, and the images dancing mysteriously in the feeble light of the night-watchman's lantern. From the tops of the towers he commands a view of the entire city. But this beauty and splendor is engulfed in the rush of propaganda for it is all a symbol of a past that Blasco condemns.

He uses some fifteen pages to cover the lives of all the bishops; the third chapter begins with an evolution of religion; then follow two conversations about music and the family, its honor, the spiritual life, prostitution, and other evils; a study of the decline in importance of Spain; something on the melancholy spirit which prevails over the Spanish people; an outline of the Spanish monarchy through the centuries; propaganda against the wealth of the church; a discussion with the employees of the cathedral of the spiritual life; propaganda against the army; a chapter on happiness, communism and the ideas of Darwin; finally, a vain attempt on the part of Gabriel to explain to ignorant

men why they should not rob the treasure of the cathedral.

All this really does not belong in a novel. It could all be written in a little different form and published in a pamphlet. Andrés González Blanco says:

"Mejor fuera que hubiera escrito un folleto de propaganda antirreligiosa y antimonárquica-- Incluso lo hubiera podido firmar con el pseudónimo de Gabriel Luna para dar más encanto misterioso a la obra y espolear la curiosidad del lector."¹

Blasco himself once said "La Catedral" was the book he liked least. "Lo encuentro pesado; hay en él demasiada doctrina."²

"El Intruso", which presents another aspect of the same religion that is scored in "La Catedral", is a direct attack against the Jesuits in Bilbao. In this novel the churchmen leave their secluded places of devotion and mix with the outside world, publish books, magazines and journals, establish educational institutions, and enter into and direct the daily lives of individuals. One of the biographers and critics of Blasco Ibáñez writes of these two books:

"'La Catedral' es el símbolo de la religión tradicional, quietista y como momificada, que subsiste aislada del mundo y confía a la autoridad y esclavamiento de su larga historia la salud de su porvenir; 'El Intruso', por el contrario, es la máscara de la religión moderna, la religión militante, que huye del reposo claustral porque comprende que en él está la muerte"³

Sánchez Morueta, a great industrial leader, is the richest and most influential man in all Bilbao. This man

1. Historia de la Novela en España, p. 625.
2. Eduardo Zamacois, Mis Contemporáneos, pp. 52 - 53.
3. Ibid., pp. 55 - 56.

has everything that money can buy but he is not happy. His wife and daughter seem so different from him that his home life means nothing. In fact, he is driven to seek pleasure outside. At the beginning of the story he scoffs at the idea of the Jesuits ever getting him in their power. At that very moment, however, they are entering his home, sitting at his table, appropriating his money, running his business, and in short, directing all his affairs. The religious order has already won over his fanatical wife. Finally, he finds himself caught in the mesh when too old and weak to struggle against the tentacles that are slowly closing about him. It is time to prepare himself for death and the spiritual life.

In "El Intruso" Blasco Ibáñez sows his seeds of propaganda by means of Luis Aresti, a young doctor. This man prefers to take care of the poor people who work in the mines near Bilbao than to live in the city and make more money.

In the first place the writer lays bare the wretched conditions in which the miners exist. He has the doctor go into the homes of these poor people in order that the reader may understand the extreme poverty with which they are burdened. On the other hand, Aresti's relative in Bilbao, Sánchez Morueta, is a fabulously wealthy industrial leader with more money than he can use.

But all this is secondary to the propaganda against the Jesuits. Doctor Aresti is made bitter against this religious order by a short and unhappy married life. It

is not long after his wedding that he begins to have trouble with his wife and her people because he is not religious enough. He was never particularly interested in the church anyway, so this experience makes him bitterer. Finally he can stand it no longer, so he leaves that hostile home and goes to a mining town at some distance from Bilbao. The people he has left behind curse his Science and he curses their Religion. From then on his religion is Science and Social Justice--Science as the means and Social Justice as the end.

Then follows a detailed account of the married life of Sánchez Morueta:

"No le extrañaba (Aresti) la situación de Sánchez: era la de muchos poderosos de aquella tierra. Vivían rodeados de todos los goces de la opulencia, pero en una triste pobreza de afectos. Los matrimonios eran vulgares asociaciones para crear hijos y que la fortuna no se perdiese. Marido y mujer vivían en aislamiento moral; él buscando consuelos fuera de la casa en amores medrosamente ocultados; ella dedicándose a la devoción."¹

In other words, the wife of Sánchez Morueta has been won over to the side of the Jesuits and is helping to extend their heavy grip on the very life of Bilbao by blind devotion, sacrifice, and the money of her husband. And so, at the very moment when this strong man, this industrial giant, this person who has built great factories and who commands thousands of men, is proudly boasting to Aresti in the garden of his home that he shall never become a victim of the Jesuits, he is being slowly but surely

1. El Intruso, p. 107.

gathered into the ever-tightening net. At any moment of weakness he can be conquered.

Sánchez Morueta has one daughter, Pepita.

"Aresti vera en su sobrina la niña rica de las familias de su tierra; educada primero por las monjas y dirigida luego por el confesor hasta en los hechos mas insignificantes, con la voluntad adormecida y considerando como un pecado el más leve intento de independencia."¹

In one instance Aresti remarks about the sadness of that part of the country.

"¡Ni amor, ni bailes, ni trato social entre los dos sexos, ni expansiones de la juventud!... La vida estaba momificada en su país. Era un cementerio muy hermoso, en el cual no había más seres vivos que los pájaros negros que lo cubrían con sus alas."²

Fernando Sanabre is a promising young engineer who is employed by Sánchez Morueta. Fernando and Pepita fall in love with each other. The Jesuits find it out. Blasco shows in detail how they proceed to pry into the private affairs of individuals. They go further. Pepita is "advised" not to have anything more to do with Fernando, after which a "novio" is chosen for her. Of course Fernando is only a poor boy and Urquiola is rich. In the meantime Sánchez Morueta wonders why Fernando has decided to leave him and go back to his province.

In these ways, then, does Blasco Ibañez bring out his revolutionary ideas in this book. It can be readily understood according to "El Intruso", how the Jesuits enter into and direct the private affairs of persons.

1. El Intruso, p. 88.
2. Ibid., p. 163.

In this book there are not so many dialogues, discussions, or monologues for or against religion and the social order. In chapter three there is a discussion on capital and labor. In another part there is a long attack on the Jesuits. In chapter eight there is a long discussion between Urquiola, the defender of the Jesuits, and Aresti; but the bitterness of this discussion is tempered somewhat by the interference of Cristina, Sánchez Morueta and Pepita.

It is evident that Blasco Ibáñez realized that if he did not change his procedure, he would produce another book like "La Catedral". The direct attacks against the church are tempered and are fewer in number. He has made the story itself more interesting so that the dose is sweetened to a certain extent.

"La Bodega" is another work of propaganda not only against the church but especially against drinking. In Andalucía the church enters into and directs the affairs of private commercial enterprises. Drinking is scored in a way that can never be forgotten by the reader. Rafael and María de la Luz, a happy young couple of the peasant class, upon whom nobody would wish harm to fall, are sweethearts. Luis Dupont, a relative of Pablo Dupont, owner of the greatest "bodegas" in Jerez, is "simpático" to be sure, but lazy, sporty, unproductive, and wild. One night, during a gay drinking party, Luis violates María de la Luz, who is under the influence of liquor. Fermín Montenegro, María's brother, tries to arrange matters with Pablo Dupont, who, of course, delays action. Upon the flat refusal of Luis himself to come to terms, Fermín, in a rage, kills him and

has to flee from Spain. María de la Luz is doomed to a long life of sorrow and penitence, Rafael's life is blackened, and the father of Fermín has become embittered. In short, the cursed custom of drinking causes a death, the ruination of a happy family, and the rupture of a courtship.

The anarchist of this book is Fernando Salvatierra, a good soul devoted to the cause of instructing the lower classes how to go about securing social justice from the rich. He is the same type of person as Gabriel Luna. Throughout the book one finds Fernando Salvatierra engaged in long conversations which contain in germ the ideas of Blasco Ibáñez. He has spent much of his time in jail and his face shows the effects of that life. He is worshipped by the poor people as a real leader and the sound of his name causes the rich people to squirm with uneasiness. Both in and out of jail he helps his fellow men by giving them some of his food and clothing. He is perfectly harmless, yet whenever he appears in Andalucía for a few weeks the authorities become alarmed and the police is concentrated in certain places. He alone is incapable of doing harm but he can cause harm to be done indirectly by means of "los de abajo" to whom he constantly preaches.

The Sánchez Morueta of this novel is Pablo Dupont, the wealthiest wine merchant in Jérez. This man differs from Morueta, however, in that he is a religious fanatic. This is another case in which the church enters into and directs not only the lives of everybody but the operations

of business firms to an amazing extent. The office of the company, with its images of saints here and there, is like a monastery. None of the clerks dare foster an independent thought, for Pablo Dupont, the employer and religious guardian, will be displeased. Furthermore, on Sundays and on days when religious festivals are held Pablo Dupont requires the attendance of all his employees of the office and the factory.

There are in his office two non-Spaniards whom he has to keep to handle the foreign correspondence. Now and then he becomes irritated because they never go to church.

"Esto se acabará. Si estos extranjeros no van a la iglesia como los demás los despediré: no quiero que den en mi casa malos ejemplos y que te sirvan de pretexto a ti para echarles de hereje."¹

He never lets them go, however, for he needs them in his business.

Elsewhere he says:

"Un amo cristiano debe preocuparse no sólo de la vida de sus dependientes, sino de su alma."²

The book is filled with descriptions of the miserable conditions under which the laborers live. Reference is made to the long hours of toil and to the insufficient food with which they try to nourish their frames of skin and bones.

"Bajo los sombreros deformes solo se veían carátulas de miseria, máscaras de sufrimiento y de hambre.....Pero los hombres mostraban un envejecimiento prematuro, arruinados en plena madurez....."

1. La Bodega, p. 35.

2. Ibid., p. 35.

"Las mujeres aun ofrecían un aspecto más doloroso. Unas eran gitanas, viejas y horribles como brujas, con la piel tostada y cobriza que parecían haber pasado por el fuego de todos los aquelarres. Las jóvenes tenían la hermosura dolorosa y desmayada de la anemia, flores de la vida que se mustiaban antes de abrirse¹....."

Not only does Salvatierra deplore the fact that the church interferes with the lives of the people but he even attacks Christianity itself. He denounces the resignation of the masses before social injustice and the Christian meekness of those who are poverty-stricken and who expect to find their reward in heaven. He maintains that charity is a mask of sweetness behind which the wealthy people may hide and exploit the masses; that it consists of crumbs thrown to the poor to keep them from springing to the table; and that the evil doers will not be punished and the patient sufferers will not find a reward in heaven for there is no spiritual life.

At one point Salvatierra destroys somewhat the reputation that Andalucía enjoys of being smiling and gay. Salvatierra and Fermín Montenegro are out walking in the country. Blasco enters into a fairly long description of the "paisaje muerto" of Andalucía, after which Salvatierra waves his hand toward the bare rolling hills and exclaims ironically:

"Mira, Fermín, ¡Andalucía la alegre! ¡Andalucía la fértil!"²

1. La Bodega, pp. 133 - 134.
2. Ibid., p. 195.

He continues to criticize ancient methods of farming, the poverty of Spain, and the concentration of the land in the hands of a few.

"Los que dan dos reales a un hombre por el trabajo de todo un día pagan hasta 50,000 reales por un caballo de fama. Créeme, Fermín: hay en esta tierra miles de seres racionales que al acostarse con los huesos doloridos en la esterilla del cortijo, quisieran despertar transformados en caballos."¹

"La Bodega" is not concerned chiefly with propaganda against the church and against the oppression of the poor by the rich. It is written against drinking, a habit that Blasco always detested. The violation of María de la Luz and the resultant darkening of the lives of several characters of the story is the greatest bit of propaganda in this book.

That is not all. Many times Salvatierra curses wine and the influence this alcoholic poison exercises over the lives of the people generation after generation. The "bodega" is the modern feudal fortress that keeps the masses in slavery and abject misery. Moments of enthusiasm, crimes, happiness, love affairs, all are products of wine. Salvatierra speaks of wine as an invisible and onnipotent person that intervenes in all the actions of those automatons, "soplando en su pensamiento, limitado y vivaracho como el de un pájaro; empujándolos lo mismo al desaliento que a la desordenada alegría."²

The poor people cannot enjoy this pleasure of the rich; but they envy them, dreaming of drunkenness as the

1. La Bodega, p. 199.

2. Ibid., p. 201.

greatest of pleasures. In their moments of anger or grumbling it is enough to place within reach the tempting glasses of the shining golden liquid, in order that their misery may be drowned in gayety and revelry.

"¡El vino! exclamo Salvatierra, "Ese es el mayor enemigo de este país: mata las energías, crea engañosas esperanzas, acaba con la vida prematuramente: todo lo destruye, hasta el amor."

Fermin smiles as he listens to these words of his former teacher.

"¡No tanto, don Fernando!"¹

Little does Fermin realize that later he will kill to avenge the destroyed love of his sister and Rafael. Little does he realize that this will drive Rafael to give up his work and return to his former occupation as smuggler.

"Ya no ~~quer~~ía trabajar. ¿De qué servía el ser bueno? Iba a volver a la vida del contrabando. ¿Mujeres? para un rato, y despues tratarlas a golpes como bestias impúdicas y sin corazón....~~Quer~~ía declararle la guerra a medio mundo, a los ricos a los que gobiernan, a los que infunden miedo con sus fusiles, y son la causa de que los pobres se vean pisoteados por los poderosos."²

At the end of the story there is an uprising which proves to be a failure. Salvatierra is clapped into jail. By the time he appears again in Andalucía the people have become resigned to their fate and accept the old order with not a murmur. And why not be thankful? The pay has been raised from two reales to two and a half a day.

1. La Bodega, p. 202.

2. Ibid., p. 357.

¡qué suerte! And as usual the wine is used to drive away sorrow. An old man is talking to Salvatierra. "Why do you take these things so seriously, don Fernando? Forget them. If we are happy, what have you to worry about? We have taken the warning. You can't do anything to those who are on top." The old man refilled a glass with wine and offered it to Salvatierra. "Drink; and don't worry about changing what can't be changed. All that talk about revolutions and equality of wealth is a pack of lies. This is the only truth--wine! It makes the time pass pleasantly. It makes us happy until death. Drink, don Fernando; I offer it to you because it is ours, because we have earned it. It is cheap. It costs almost nothing."

Then Blasco's mouthpiece takes a parting shot at the curse.

"Salvatierra el imposible, se estremeció con un arretrato de cólera.....Arañando la tierra sudando en sus surcos, dejando en sus entrañas lo mejor de su existencia, producían ellos este líquido de oro; y los poderosos se valían de él para embriagarlos, para mantenerlos como encantados en una falsa alegría....."¹

"La Bodega" is similar to "El Intruso" in that the same amount of propaganda issues from the mouth of Salvatierra. In the former book, however, the plot is even more interesting.

Of the three books, "La Catedral", "El Intruso", and "La Bodega" the latter is the one that presents the propaganda of Blasco Ibáñez most effectively. This type of novel was new to him when he wrote "La Catedral". He realized wherein it had defects. "El Intruso" was better.

1. La Bodega, p. 371.

Both these novels, however, served as stepping stones for the third and last of its kind. If he had written more such attacks against the church, social conditions, and drinking they would undoubtedly have been much better. Either Blasco wanted to be certain his readers knew exactly what he meant, or he would have written in that characteristic style of his, anyway. Nothing is left for the reader to imagine. One does not have to interpret the actions and words of characters as containing some hidden significance. His characters actually say what he wishes to be said. This is overdone in "La Catedral"; an improvement is noticeable in "El Intruso"; the greatest artistic progress has been made in "La Bodega". The first contains propaganda against the church only; the second, propaganda against both the church and social conditions; but the third contains all this and an attack on drinking as well. The agitator does not become entangled in so many long arguments and discussions. It is his business to do so but Blasco wisely leaves practically all of them out of the book and simply refers to them. The plot, then, has the prominent place in "La Bodega".

"La Bodega" is, therefore, the most artistic of the three. In all his books, however, it is the custom, in his sincere desire to present a complete account of the life about which he writes, to retard the action by devoting too many pages to past history. He could have eliminated the last chapter of "El Intruso", which deals with a clash between striking laborers and members of a religious procession.

To be sure it serves a purpose. During the confusion, Dr. Aresti meets Sánchez Morueta face to face while the latter is marching along with the faithful ones. The story could have been ended with the preceding chapter in which Dr. Aresti unexpectedly meets Sánchez Morueta, who is by that time completely won over to the cause of the Jesuits, and who is spending some time in contemplation and prayer at a monastery in order to prepare himself for the spiritual life. The same is true of the last chapter of "La Bodega". This one is probably more depressing than any other in the story. Blasco could have ended with the next to the last chapter for Luis had been killed, Fermín had fled, María de la Luz had been disgraced, and Rafael had been driven in desperation and sorrow to smuggling. Blasco does, however, strike a happy note which is not the usual thing for him to do. Everybody concerned decides to forget the past, leave Jérez, and go to America to begin life over again. The very ending, however, in which Salvatierra remains alone and abandoned in Spain to carry on the thankless and fruitless task of changing the social order, is true to the style of Blasco Ibáñez.

"La Horda" is the miserable crowd of rag-pickers, smugglers, vagabonds, peddlers, beggars, and thieves that live in the poor quarters of Madrid so often described by Pío Baroja.

Isidro Maltrana, the hero, a bright lad but with a weak will, is born among this element. Now ordinarily a boy of this class learns a trade so that he may make a living for himself. In this case a rich woman becomes

interested in him, takes him into her home, and sends him to school. Maltrana secures his bachelor's degree and is almost through with his course in "Filosofía y Letras", when his benefactress dies. She has made no provision in her will for the completion of the education of Maltrana, who finds himself abandoned by the rest of the family and regarded as one of "los de abajo". After making his living for a while by writing articles for newspapers he becomes acquainted with Gaspar Jiménez, a politician. Now the latter wishes to write a book that will win for him prestige as an economist and thinker. As he is a busy man and cannot spend the time on such a monumental work he lets Maltrana do it for him. Maltrana, pleased to be honored by such an important gentleman, gladly accepts the work and considers himself fortunate. When he has received the money for his labors he feels quite flushed with success and considers himself one of the "burguesía". After a short courtship with Feliciano, a young pretty girl with whom he has become acquainted, they both go to a different part of Madrid to live together. At first all goes well. After Maltrana finishes the book, however, he can get no more work. Things then begin to go from bad to worse until Feliciano dies in a hospital a short while after giving birth to a child. The last pages of the book are lighted by a ray of hope for Maltrana for he has found work. He no longer aspires to obtain a literary reputation and since he cannot become an artist he will learn a trade and work for his child.

Blasco Ibáñez has invented no character in "La Horda" to urge his ideas. He tells a story and as one reads one gets an insight into the conditions under which the poor people of Madrid exist. Blasco's propaganda is contained in description. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions for there is no direct criticism here.

"Sangre y Arena" is an attack on bull-fighting. Juan Gallardo, the hero, the greatest bull fighter of all Spain, is shown at the opening of the story in all his glory. Later, he loses his nerve and his fame rapidly dwindles away to nothing. At the end Blasco Ibáñez brings out forcibly the cruelties of the sport. "Sangre y Arena" must be read with delight by foreigners who consider bull-fighting a cruel sport.

Besides doing his work well, Gallardo really entertains the audience with his dare-devil feats. Other men go about their work of killing bulls as cautiously as possible for they have families dependent on them. So does Gallardo have a wife but he delights in making the spectator gasp and exclaim, "¡Qué hombre!"

Blasco, in the opening pages of the story, gives an inkling as to what he intends to do later. Juan Gallardo is prepared to go to the bull ring and is attacked with the usual fear. Will he emerge safely from this fight? Will he be able to send home the usual telegram, "sin novedad"?

One day while fighting, Gallardo is thrown by a bull and seriously hurt in the leg. It is necessary for him to rest all winter at the end of which period of time his leg

is healed and apparently as good as ever. It is sometime later, however, that he realizes that he has seen his best days. He does not receive such a tremendous ovation at his first appearance in the spring for he does not perform so well. He cannot plant the "espada" in just the right place. His arm does not seem to be long enough. His leg feels weak and he cannot get out of the way of the bull quickly. He is not so daring as he used to be. It is not long before the public perceives this and of course the usual thing happens. Juan Gallardo's fame rapidly diminishes in one bull-fight after another as he fails to equal his better days. No longer does he think of performing daring feats to please the public. He only wishes to collect his salary and do his work with the least possible danger to himself.

"He hid between the 'Barreras', fleeing from the insults that were being hurled at him. Pillows, empty tonic bottles, and bits of fruit were thrown into the ring; curses, threats, hisses, whistling, and ribald remarks were heard from all quarters. There he remained tired and panting, with one leg aching, satisfied, in the midst of his misfortune, that he was free from danger. He had not been killed by the horns of the beast.....thanks to his prudence." "¡Ah, el público! ¡Muchedumbre de asesinos que ansían la muerte de un hombre como si sólo ellos amasen la vida y tuvieran una familia!"¹

By far the greatest part of the propaganda of this book is contained in the last chapter. Gallardo's wife has

1. Sangre y Arena, p. 383.

has been hearing of his series of failures. During every season this poor woman lives through days of terror, realizing that she may receive bad news at any moment. This anxiety becomes greater after the last "cogida". She continues to write letters in which she implores him to give up bullfighting as a profession. This state of affairs continues until the day of his miserable failure when he receives his first "aviso" from the president's box. Carmen receives a letter from her husband in which she plainly sees that he intends to do something spectacular in order to regain the favor of the public. Almost beside herself with fear and scarcely knowing what she does, she goes to Madrid to be near him if anything happens.

Now Carmen has never been to a bullfight in her life and she does not wish to see this one so she remains in the "capilla" in order to pray. The infirmary in an adjoining room receives its first moaning victim shortly after the bullfight begins. She can stay no longer in the "capilla". She goes out to the "patio" and this is what she sees:

"Sangre por todos lados; sangre en el suelo y en las inmediaciones de unas cubas, donde el agua mezclábase con el líquido rojo."¹

"When the horse was patched up with barbarous speed, a bucket of water was thrown on his head, his feet were freed of the strap and he was given a few blows with a stick so that he would get up. Some scarcely took two steps forward when they fell with blood spilling out of the wound. It was instantaneous death when the intestines regained their normal position."²

1. Sangre y Arena, p. 393.

2. Ibid., p. 395.

"Horses were mended as if they were old shoes. Their weakness was exploited even to the last moment, prolonging their agony and their death. On the ground were scattered here and there pieces of intestines that were cut out in order to facilitate the operation. Other fragments of their intestines were in the ring covered with sand until the bull should be killed when the "mozos" could pick up these scraps of flesh in their baskets. Many times the empty space due to the loss of the intestines was filled with burlap. The important thing was to make these animals stand up a few minutes more so that the "picadores" could go out to the ring again: there the bull would put an end to the suffering of the horse...."¹

"La sangre corría entre las piedras, ennegreciéndose al secarse."²

"The cries of the invisible crowd could be heard in the "patio". They were exclamations of anxiety; an 'Oh! Oh!' from the thousands of people told of the flight of the "banderillero" closely followed by the bull. Then absolute silence. The man was returning to the beast. Thunderous applause broke out after a pair of 'banderillas' had been well placed. Then the trumpets sounded announcing the 'suerte de matar' and the applause was repeated."²

Carmen has only heard other people talk about bull-fights; she has only heard what the average spectator sees-- the great battle in the ring accompanied by pomp and brilliant display of colors. The public knows nothing of this

1. Sangre y Arena, p. 396.
2. Ibid., p. 397.

horrible butchery that takes place behind the scenes--all for their entertainment. A frightful thought passes through Carmen's mind. "¡Y ellos vivían, de esta fiesta, con sus repugnantes martirios de animales débiles! ¡Y su fortuna había sido hecha a costa de tales espectáculos!"

The bull that Gallardo is to kill enters the ring. It is too tame so fireworks are used to further antagonize the beast.

This is the bull that tosses Gallardo. In his endeavor to please the public he is struck a fatal blow. He is carried to the infirmary where he dies a few minutes later.

Then follows the most powerful attack against bull-fighting in the whole book. Gallardo's "banderillero" returns to the ring. "Sentíó nacer en su pensamiento un odio feroz por todo lo que le rodeaba; una aversión a su oficio y al público que lo mantenía."¹

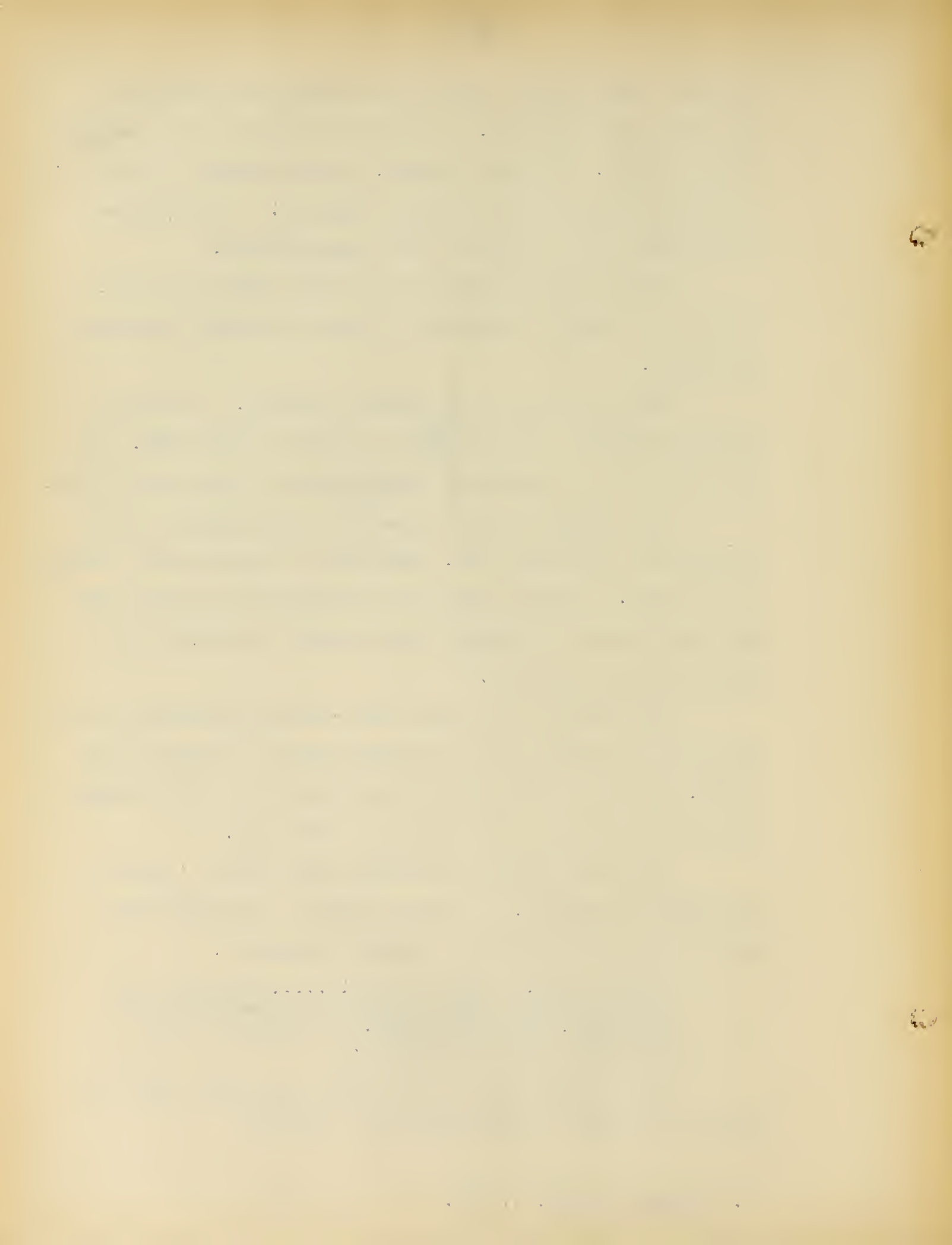
"He thought of the bull that was being dragged in the sand at that moment, with its neck burned and covered with blood, its legs stiff and its eyes glassy--eyes that looked toward the blue sky as do those of a dead man."

"Then he pictured his friend, also still, 'con las extremidades rígidas, el vientre abierto y un resplendor mate y misterioso entre las pestañas cruzadas'."

"¡Pobre toro! ¡Pobre espada! De pronto el cirio rumoroso lanzó un alarido saludando la continuación, del espectáculo. El nacional cerró los ojos y apretó los puños."

Then follows the last and most significant line in which the public is represented as a monster:

1. Sangre y Arena, p. 409.

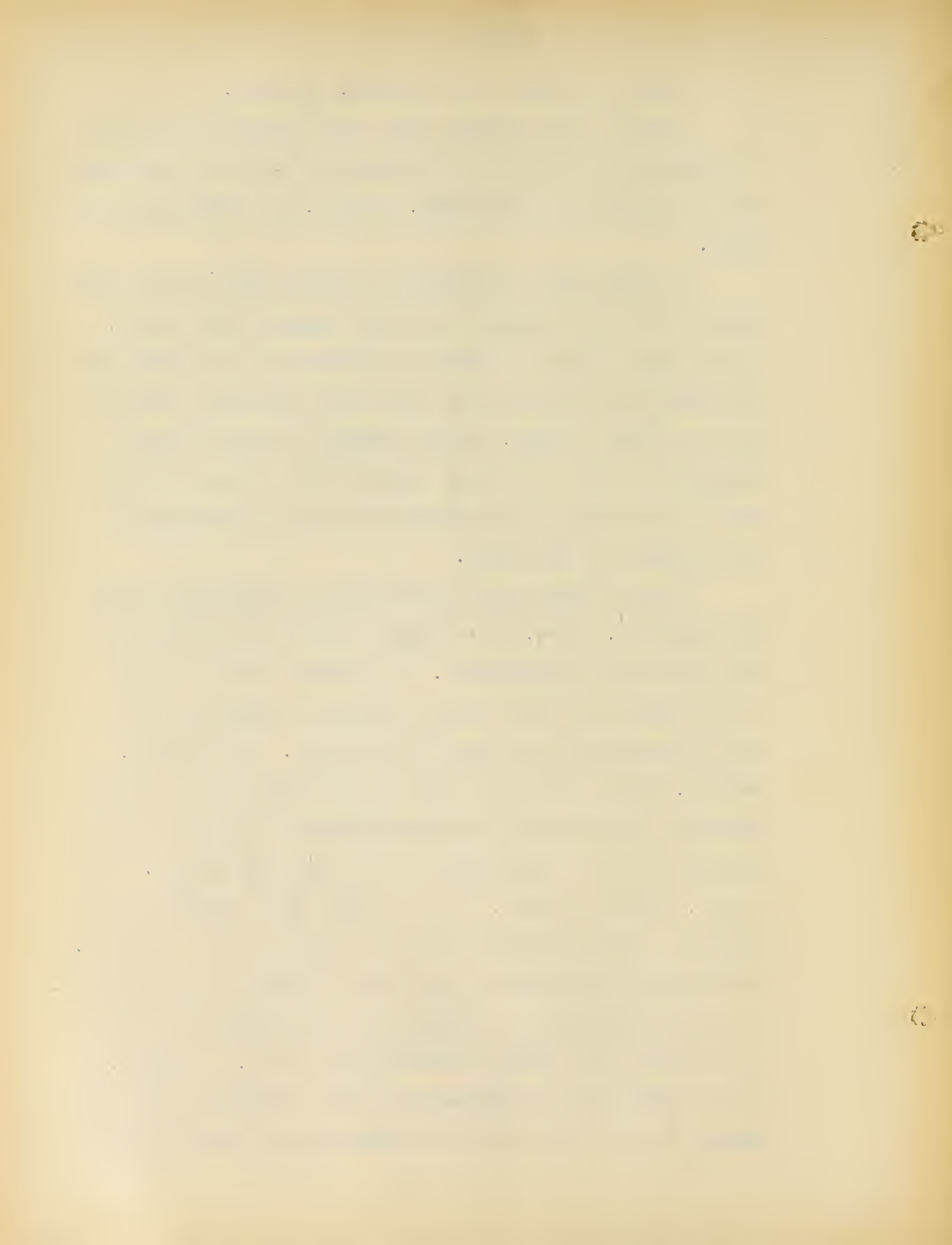


"Rugía la fiera: la verdadera, la única."

Such are the thoughts that flash through the mind of a foreigner as he sits in a bullring and hears the deafening noise produced by the cheering, hissing, and whistling of the crowd.

It seems that bullfighting has lost some of its attractiveness and that football is slowly coming to the front. If the former sport is finally superseded by the latter for the benefit of Spain, some of the credit certainly must be given to Blasco Ibáñez, for his "Sangre y Arena" clearly demonstrates that the average Spaniard who thinks and who has the interests of his country at heart is awakening to the brutality of the sport.

Blasco Ibáñez wrote other works of propaganda which are important, namely, "Los Cuatros Jinetes del Apocalipsis" and "Una Nación Secuestrada". The former a novel written in 1916 while the World War was raging, is important as a work of propaganda in favor of the allies. This thesis, however, is not concerned with the war propaganda of Blasco Ibáñez as contained in "Los Cuatro Jinetes" and other works produced while in the employ of the French Government. The latter, written in 1924, is not a novel but a pamphlet containing a scathing denunciation of Alfonso and his policies. The English translation of its title, "Alfonso XIII Unmasked", is indeed appropriate, for these fifty odd pages of invective in which the king is denounced as a liar, a schemer, a worthy descendant of Ferdinand VII, are a daring attempt to snatch the mask from before the monarch, and doubtless had

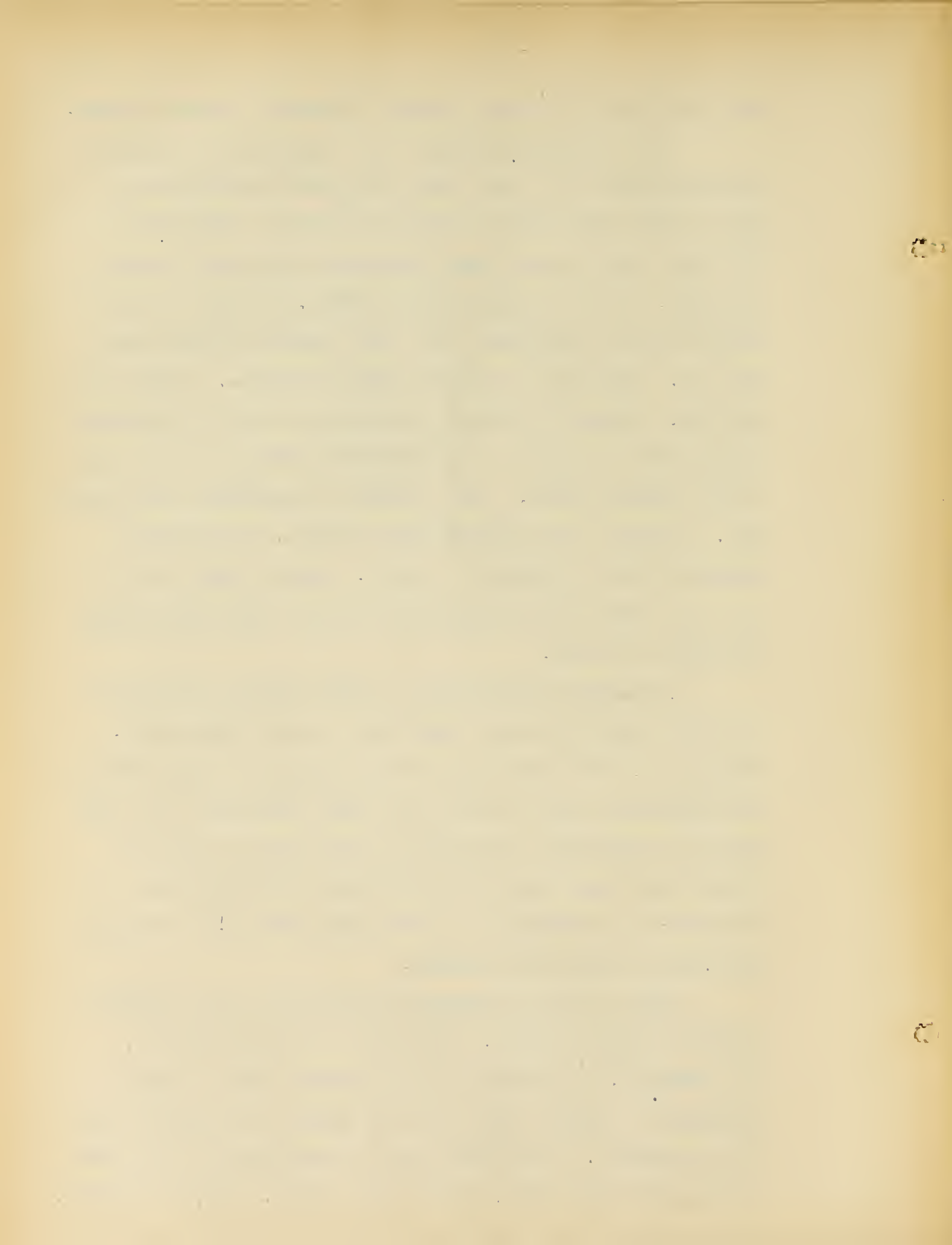


some influence in rousing popular sentiment towards Alfonso.

"Una Nación Secuestrada" was something that Blasco wrote hurriedly at a time when the pitiful conditions of Spain roused him from the tranquil life of a novelist to the point where he lay bare the reasons for Spain's backwardness, not in a sugar-coated fashion, but with all the bitterness and savageness that could possibly spring from his pen. The king is attacked from all angles. Nothing is omitted. Alfonso is blamed for the grip that the militarist forces have on Spain. He is denounced because he is a chip of the Bourbon block. His friends are denounced along with him. Alfonso, the great "military leader", is ridiculed because of his victories in Africa. Blasco pokes fun at his many ambitions and blames him for the long dictatorship of Primo de Rivera.

The English translation of "Una Nación Secuestrada" is quite free as one may find after a short examination. Evidently it was translated for the purpose of being sold as an interesting story as well as a book containing the truth about the deplorable condition of Spain for the work is divided into chapters with interesting titles such as, "Machine-Gun Government" and "The King Must Go!" It is, in fact, most interesting reading.

There is some propaganda contained in the Valencian novels of Blasco Ibáñez, especially in his masterpiece, "La Barraca". It all has to do, however, with the vain struggle of the man who is down to better his condition and is too general. This thesis will be restricted to the five novels, mentioned above, against the church, against drinking,



and against bullfighting.

Of the five novels, "La Horda" is the one which appeals most to the emotions of the reader. This is not a "novela de tesis". The anarchist is lacking. There is no one to speak against the church, no one to attack the social order, no one to declare to the world the evil effects of liquor. "Se advierte en ella un sano deseo de diluir cada vez mas la parte tendenciosa y supeditarla a la parte novellesca."¹

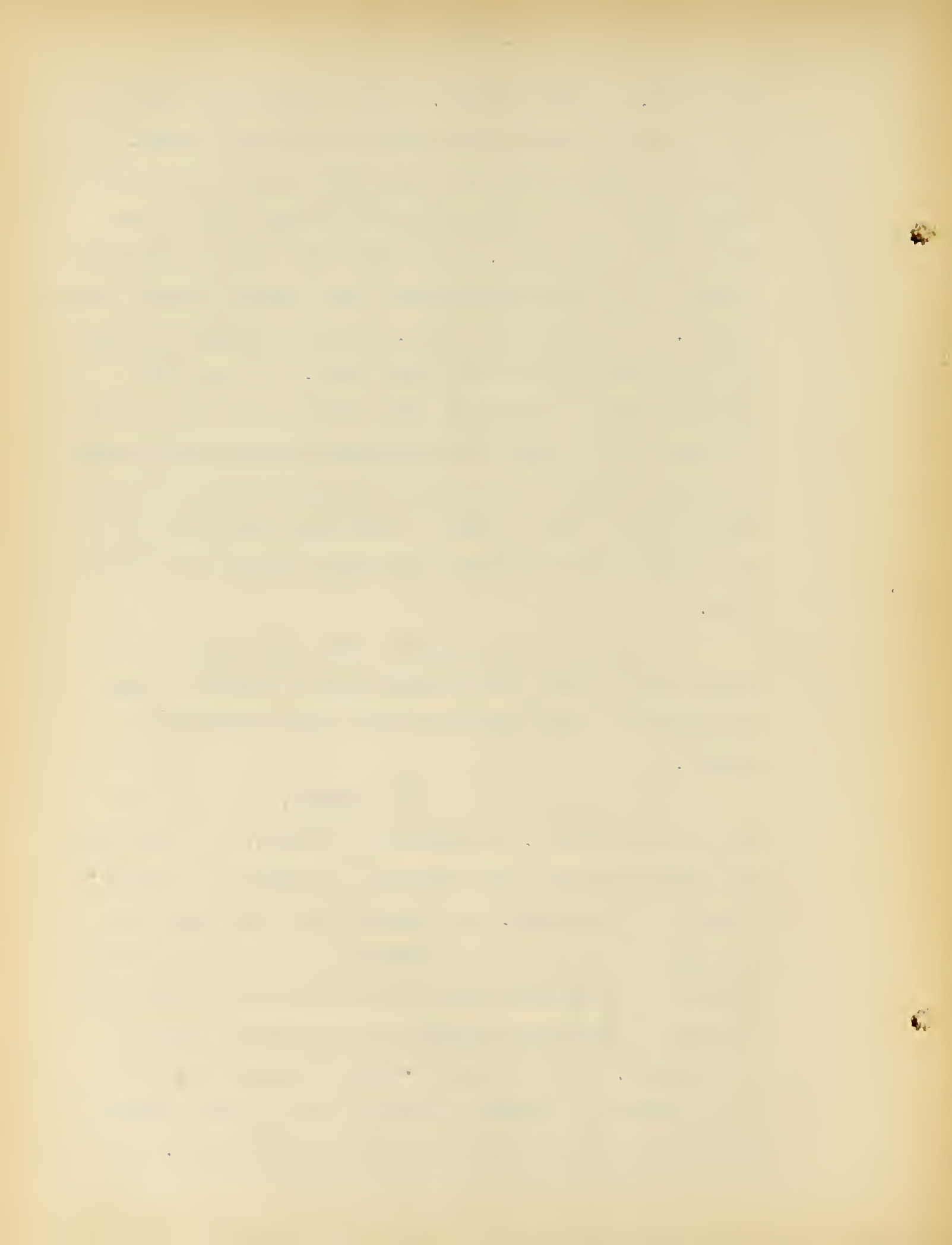
The social order is attacked, however, by a description of the sordid conditions under which the lower classes of Madrid exist. The dominant feature of the story is the plot. The second half of this novel is most depressing. The author relates with all the horrible details possible the sufferings of this young couple who get married, not in the church but behind the church. It is not long before their money is almost gone. Feliciano works on corsets from early morning until late at night in order to earn a few pesetas and thus keep them from starving. But that is not enough. They have to sell their furniture, piece by piece. When that money is gone Maltrana begins to borrow. They are put out of that house because they cannot pay the rent. They go to live in the gypsy section but misfortune continues to pursue them. Winter comes. There is no heat in the house and they have not sufficient clothing to keep their bodies warm. Feliciano suffers two attacks of eclampsia. Through the influence of a friend of Isidro, she is removed to a hospital. While she remains there Isidro wanders about the streets aimlessly, friendless, and

1. Andrés González-Blanco, Historia de la Novela en España, p. 636.

homeless. A child is born. About a week later Isidro is told that Feliciano has died in one of the attacks. Even after this, misfortune continues to harass him. Two weeks later he is informed that she had not died at the time, but a week later. He is also told that her body was taken to the dissecting room and later thrown into the "fosa común". It is only after this, with the coming of spring, that his long horrible experience ends. As one reads, thoughts like the following pass through one's mind: Will this ever end? Surely their condition cannot become worse. But Blasco Ibáñez is particularly skillful in picturing the sufferings of "los de abajo", and in this novel he does it by playing upon the emotions more than in any of the other four.

It does not seem possible that anyone would care to reread these novels for pleasure except to obtain a good description of the Spanish national sport in "Sangre y Arena".

The descriptions of Blasco Ibáñez, like those of Zola, are realistic. No detail is left out. All the blood, the agonized cries, the suffering are present in "Sangre y Arena"; the bad odors, the cramped living conditions and the misery of the people of Madrid are brought out in "La Horda"; the wretched lives of the miners of Bilbao and the laborers of Jerez are depicted in "El Intruso" and in "La Bodega". He was still influenced by Zola, then, in these "novelas de tesis", as may be seen in his clamoring for a social change and his realistic descriptions. In

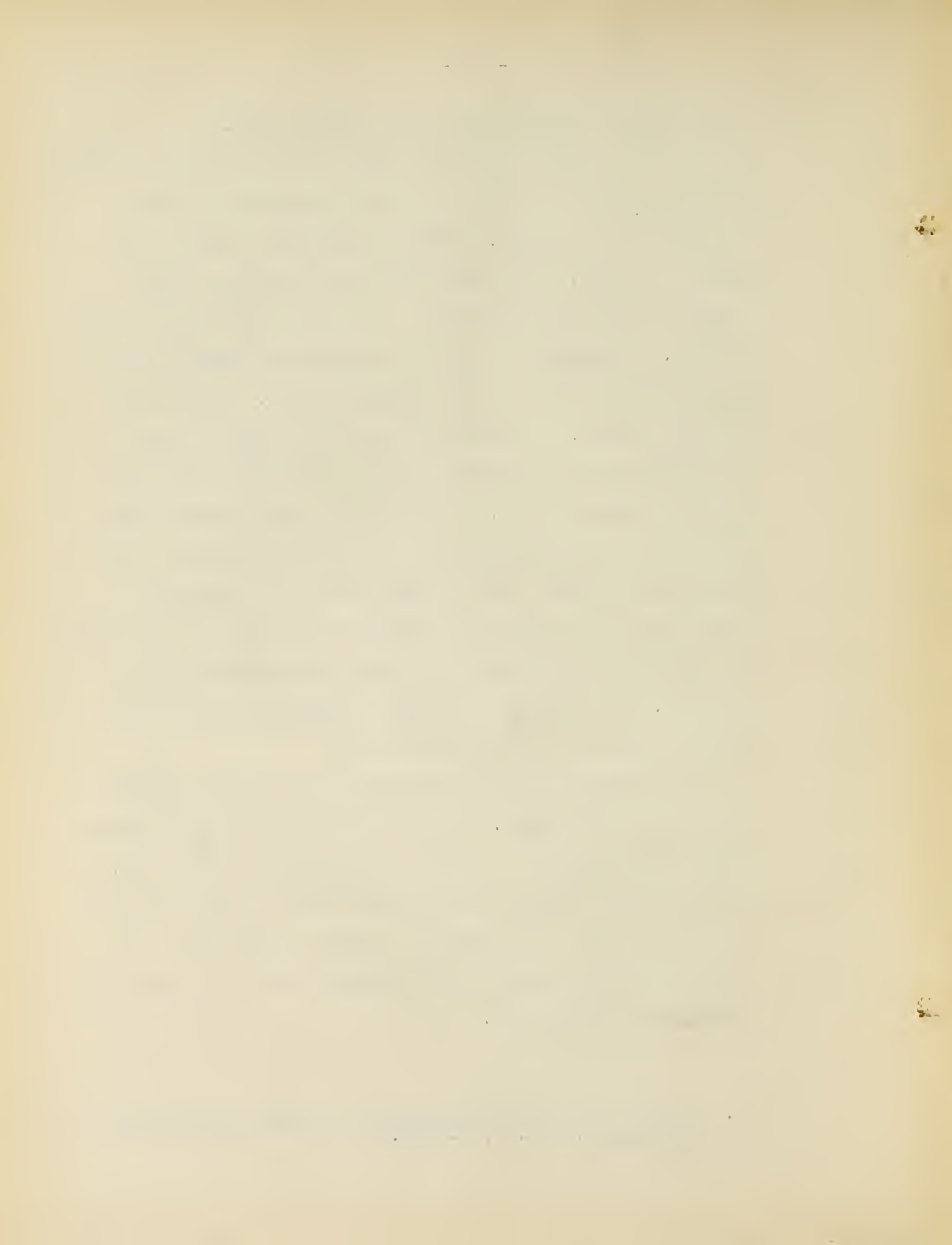


fact, Blasco called himself the Spanish Zola.¹

He was a veritable painter, transferring to paper exactly what he had seen. He was a painter of people, masses, street scenes, customs, injustice, sorrow, and tragic endings. His novels are descriptions of human nature, never interpretations. He never analyzed his characters. According to one of his critics, Joaquín Ortega, he devoted his life to the wrong vocation. Instead of writing novels, he should have given his time to the production of the artistic and the monumental album of Spanish regional life. Of course his descriptions such as those in "Los Argonautos" and in "Mare Nostrum", are sometimes tiresome even in these novels of propaganda. For example, he breaks the thread of the story of "La Horda" to tell the reader something about the customs of the gypsies. The account of a gypsy wedding is interesting but it does not belong in that novel.

In these novels of propaganda he is still a great painter of mob scenes. In "El Intruso" he has the miners clash with a group of religious people on a pilgrimage. In "La Bodega" he has the laborers rise in revolt against the rich people. In "Sangre y Arena" he introduces the reader time and again to the peculiarities of the crowds that attend bullfights.

1. Cejador y Frauca, Historia de la Lengua y Literatura Castellana, Vol. 9, p. 472.



It is this power to describe skillfully and accurately life as he has seen it that makes people reread his books; it is the excellence of his descriptions that has made his work notable in spite of his many defects which relegate him to a third or a fourth place as a man of letters.

It seems to be an accepted fact among some critics that the characters of all the author's books do not stand out. To be sure the principal characters as well as the minor characters of the five novels in question are engulfed somewhat by the propaganda. Gabriel Luna is an example of one who is completely cast into the background in order that the ideas of the author may stand boldly forth. In the later works the principal characters are all used as a means to an end but they enjoy more prominent positions. Aresti and Gallardo are more like human beings than machines while thoughts of Maltrana and Feliciano leave vivid impressions in the mind of the reader. It cannot be said, therefore, that his characters in general are obliterated by the rush of events.

All his men are fighters like himself, struggling for fame, power, or life. The reader cannot

peer into the hidden chambers of the soul. They are men of action who act on impulse. Sánchez Morueta and Pablo Dupont, by force of will together with capacity and hard work, won high places as great business men. Fermín Montenegro killed in order to avenge the violation of his sister. Gallardo threw himself recklessly at the horns of the bull in his last attempt to regain the goodwill of the people. All his characters are real men. Here and there throughout the stories one will find such expressions as these applied to his characters: "era todo un hombre"; "tan hombre como el que más"; "el hombre más hombre".

The women occupy secondary places in these novels for love is never the chief interest. There are three types: the cringing, obedient, humble woman like Sagrario, María de la Luz, and Feliciano; the religious fanatic like Cristina; and the restless, fickle adventuress like doña Sol. Of these above named women Sagrario and Feliciano, the two that are overwhelmed with misfortune, stand out from the others. The penitence of Sagrario cannot be easily forgotten and the fortitude of Feliciano, a mere girl, under the weight of misfortune greater than most older people have to bear, is admirable. Joaquín Ortega once said that there was not in all his work "una sola mujer completa". Yet thoughts of Sagrario and Feliciano linger in the mind long after one has read the novels.

This is what M. Romera Navarro says about the women of Blasco:

"El único tipo de mujer que ha trazado con maestría, el único que se fija en la memoria del lector y perdura en ella, es el de la hembra caprichosa, dominante, voluptuosa, que aparece, primero en 'Entre Narajos' como actriz, reaparece como gran dama cazadora del placer en 'Sangre y Arena', y y vuelve a salir como espía en 'Mare Nostrum'." ¹

The the reason that they are "caprichosas" leads one to forget them as soon as the stories have been read. Sagrario and Feliciano are far more superior to doña Sol.

None of his women, however, will become immortal for he never considered women important.

"La mujer no es toda la vida.....! Ni siquiera la mitad de la vida! Con ser indudablemente lo mejor que hay en ella. No es que yo la desprecie como los orientales pero tampoco sufrí jamás su imperio tiránico. Yo soy un macho, un gozador, no un sentimental. Yo opino que la mujer es una de las muchas cosas legítimamente codiciables y dignas de conquista que hay bajo el sol....." ²

In that paragraph are the reasons why the women in his novels are relegated to places of less importance than are the women of other writers. He liked their company for a short while but their frivolity and their feminine ways bored him. Love, which is not the dominant note of his novels, was not the only thing.

".....luego el varón fuerte debe zafarse de los blancos brazos enlazados a su cuello, y proseguir su camino, su lucha sagrada por el mejoramiento y el bienestar humanos y la conquista de la tierra." ³

1. Historia de la Literatura Española, p. 651 ff.
2. Eduardo Zamacois, Mis Contemporáneos, p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 94-95.

In these novels of Blasco there are no women as brave as the men for Blasco could never imagine great feminine valor.

Some of the secondary characters are interesting. One cannot help being touched by the pitiful condition in which Sagrario returns from Madrid and the manner in which she condemns herself to penitence in the cathedral. How can one refuse to forgive her for her sins? Near the end of the story, she and Gabriel realize that they are in love with each other. It is a different kind of love, however, which unites them.

"Y los dos inválidos de la vida se olvidaban de la propia dolencia para pensar en la del otro, estableciéndose entre sus almas una corriente de conmiseración amorosa, atrayéndose, no por el apasionamiento del sexo, sino por la simpatía fraternal que le inspiraba su desgracia."¹

There is a conversation between Gabriel and Sagrario that is one of the greatest I have ever read.

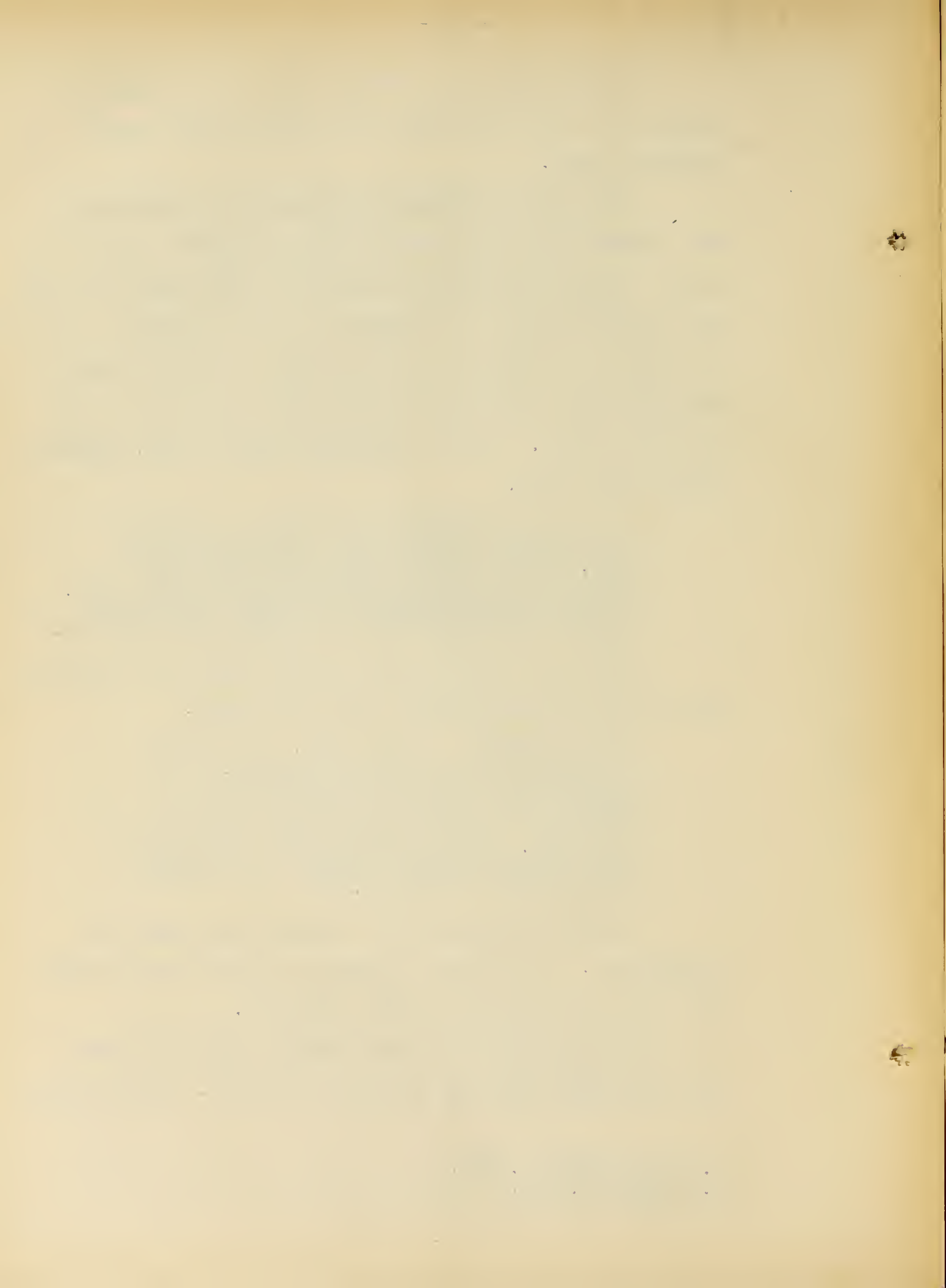
"No te separes: no me temas. Ni yo soy un hombre, ni tú eres ya una mujer. Has sufrido mucho, has dicho adiós a las alegrías de la tierra, eres fuerte por el infortunio y puedes mirar cara a cara a la verdad. Somos dos náufragos de la vida: sólo nos resta esperar y morir en el islote que nos sirve de refugio."²

Fernando Sanabre, of "El Intruso", is almost as interesting. This honest, sincere, ambitious young man is just one of the victims of the "Intruso".

The anarchists of Blasco Ibáñez always seem more like Christians than the religious fanatics. Spain abounds

1. La Catedral, p. 232.

2. Ibid., p. 319.



in these philosophical anarchists as distinguished from the terrorist anarchists. The former class believe that there should be only what government as is absolutely necessary. Such anarchists hold the theory that the government of man by man is essentially unphilosophical and wrong, that the highest attainment of humanity is to be reached by the freedom of the individual to make the fullest expression of his own character and qualities, unhindered by repression or control from without; that hence any such control is fundamentally objectionable. They hold that the perfection of humanity will never be attained until all government is abolished, and each individual left absolutely free. The defenders of this system disclaim all violent methods.

Salvatierra never hesitated to give his money to help a person in need. He even used to give away his clothes and food in order that someone in a worse condition might be more comfortable. He drank only water, and as for eating he took only bread and cheese. This was his food twice a day since he left jail. He could live on thirty "céntimos" a day. He had decided that as long as social inequality existed and millions of beings perished slowly because of improper nourishment, he was not entitled to more.

On the one hand Cristina sinks her money into the church where it does not alleviate suffering; on the other hand Dr. Aresti gives up all chances to become rich and dedicates himself and his knowledge to the curing of the sick people in the poverty-stricken mining towns.

Luna, while endeavoring to convince his brother that

he should permit Sagrario to return, actually seems more like a Christian than Esteban who professes to be a follower of Christ.

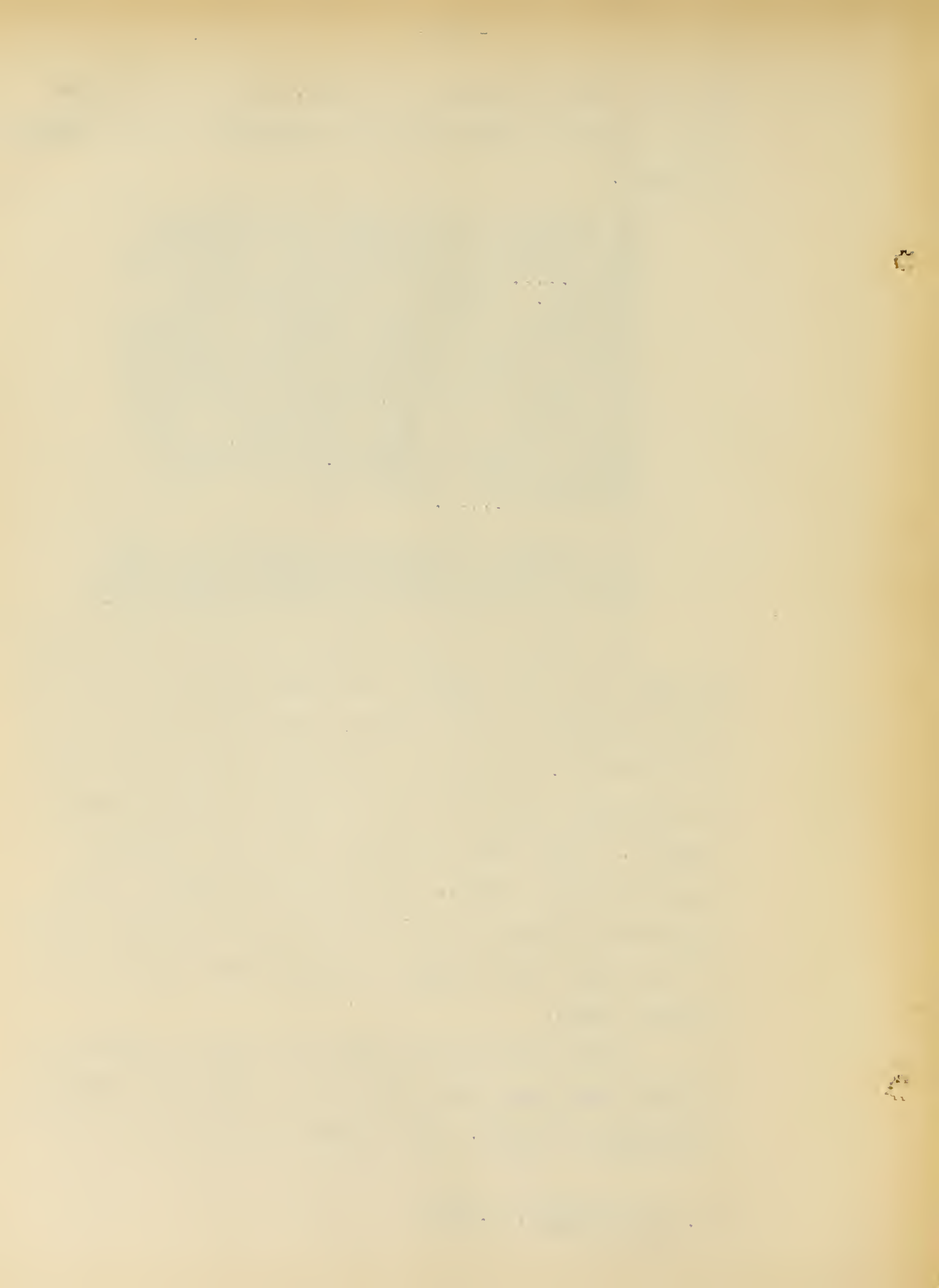
"Al que falta a las leyes de la familia, al que deserta de su bandera, tú lo condenas para siempre, lo sentencias a la muerte del olvido..... Entendemos el honor de un modo distinto. Tú eres el honor castellano: aquel honor tradicional y bárbaro, más cruel y funesto que la misma deshonra: un honor teatral, cuyos impulsos no arrancan nunca de los sentimientos humanos, sino del miedo al que dirán, del deseo de aparecer muy grande y muy digno a los ojos de los demás antes que a los de la propia conciencia. Para la esposa adúltera la muerte, el asesinato vengador; para la hija fugitiva el desprecio, el olvido;....."¹

"Tu religión hace a los hijos frutos de Dios, y sin embargo, creéis ser mejores y más perfectos cuando repeléis y maldecís esos regalos del cielo apenas se causan una contrariedad."¹

The novels of Blasco Ibáñez are filled with emotion. He could not write without injecting emotion into his work. This enthusiasm is what made him prostitute his art as in "La Catedral". The secret of whatever success his works of propaganda might have had is found in the emotional element. These works are based upon two or three outstanding ideas, namely, the evils of the church, social injustice, drinking, and bullfighting, and all the efforts of the writer are combined to unmask these monsters which shackle Spain.

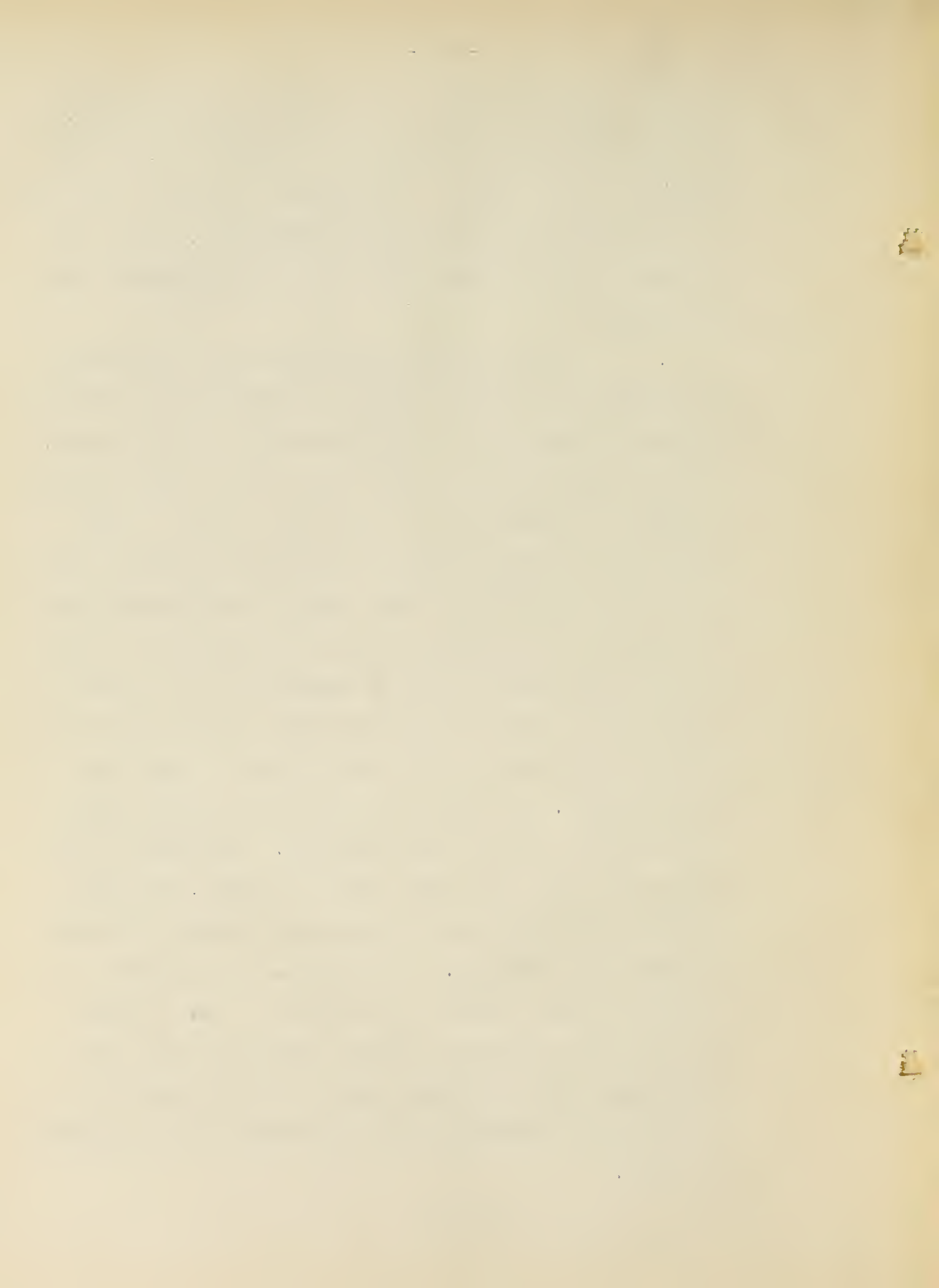
Blasco has been the object of several accusations. In the first place many people have accused him of being a melodramatic writer. This "defect" appears in all his works,

1. La Catedral, p. 165.



from the Valencian novels to the third group of books. How his earlier and later books are affected is not the concern of this thesis. The emotional effect is certainly not out of place in the works of propaganda. Is it not by means of the emotions that a piece of propaganda does its work?

In the second place Blasco has been accused as a vulgar and obscene writer. The vulgarity of Blasco, however, is only in the language and not in the thought. It is in the manner of saying things rather than the significance conveyed; it is in the great desire to copy exactly the exterior aspect of reality in order to force his views to the front. This brings to one's mind again the trend of the naturalists and the influence of Zola. It is possible that he may be improper in some places. There are many other well-known modern writers who are really vulgar but they will never become as great as Blasco Ibáñez. His works have to do with social difficulties which are real live problems. Sometimes in the very novels that have been marked as vulgar, beautiful passages are mixed with the repulsive pictures of human weakness and suffering. For example, the spiritual relation between Gabriel and Sagrario in "*La Catedral*" is one of the delightful passages amid the stream of propaganda. The beautiful words of brotherhood and forgiveness of Salvatierra in "*La Bodega*" may be pointed out also.



In the third place many critics say that Blasco is a pessimist but he is not. To be sure, according to him, life is a struggle. Life is not what it should be but one should try to make it better. Not only his books of propaganda but many others as well are songs to progress and the idea of universal brotherhood. He is not a fatalist as one may suppose. He recognizes the existence of Destiny but he does not fold his arms and submit to it mildly. He loves life above all things. His heroes fight until they fall dead or useless in the battle. It seems that Blasco likes to write about men who struggle against great difficulties for the sake of trying to dominate situations. This is the reason why his novels appeal to Americans. Sometimes his characters struggle on to the end and when circumstances have pushed them into a corner, they themselves become challengers, as in the case of Isidro Maltrana when he sits outside his house with his baby in his arms and swears that he will strive to do for it what he could not do for Feliciano. In a very few instances, as in "Los Muertos Mandan", the characters go right to the end with a blind faith that rolls aside all obstacles. They have the rooted belief that they cannot be beaten. Practically all the heroes of Blasco, however, do not triumph; they succumb sooner or later before the inevitable circumstances. Gabriel Luna, Sánchez Morueta, Fernando Salvatierra, Isidro Maltrana, Juan Gallardo--all the heroes of his novels of propaganda are finally beaten down to death or submission. Most of his characters go down fighting before black

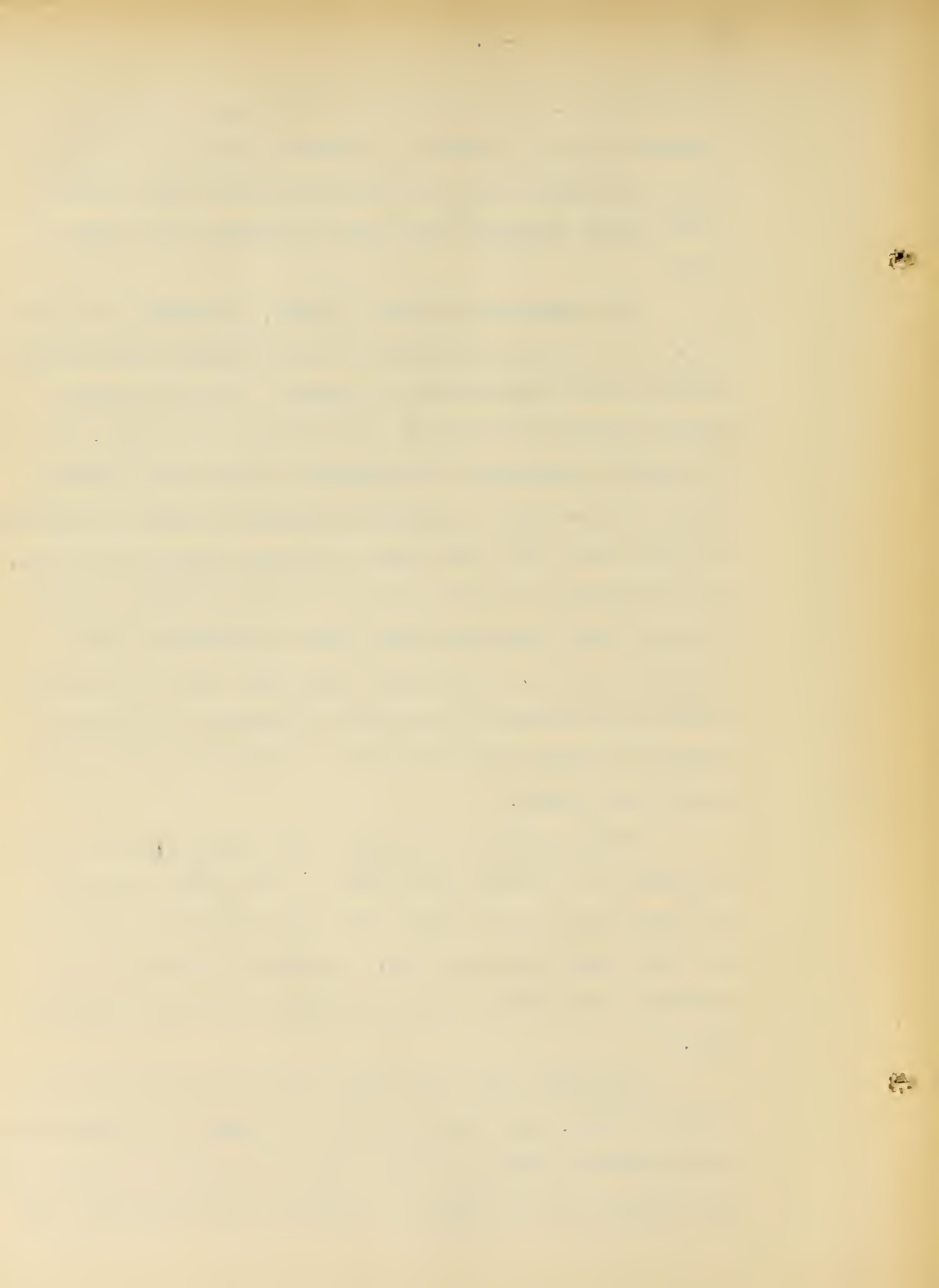


Impossibility. How can one say that Blasco Ibáñez is a pessimist when he admires a fighter? How can one accuse him of pessimism when his characters do not lose without first having disputed with brain and muscle the right to live?

The pessimism of Blasco Ibáñez, therefore, is healthful. It is not the pessimism of the fatalists who renounce action because everything is ordained: for his heroes, life is a book in which they must write a few lines. It is not the pessimism of the Spanish "pícaro" who believes that it is useless to persist in changing things by climbing the hard steep path when there are easier ways to get along. For the heroes of Blasco, life is a stark reality, a path that one must follow and knock down the barriers that obstruct the way. They throw themselves into the conflict without hesitation as Don Quijote attacked the windmills without noticing the resistance of Rocinante or the hardness of his lance.

Nothing cheerful relieves the gloom hanging over the pictures in all these works which I have been discussing. They are replete with scenes of shadow and misery that bar all that means light and joy. Apparently Blasco is of a dramatic temperament: what is gruesome seems to fascinate him.

The great force with which Blasco wrote covers his other defects. His style is wordy at times, his observation is superficial when he is away from his native Valencia, and his language is too emphatic, careless, and incorrect. He



wrote by impulse without preoccupation as to literary form.

He says:

"Yo soy de los que producen por explosión. Mi trabajo resulta semejante al del torpedo que parte vertiginosamente; unas veces toca en el blanco deseado, otras se pierde sin éxito en el vacío; pero cuando estalla lo hace con una brevedad instantánea y tumultuosa."¹

Blasco never went back to correct and finish: his words jumped from his pen and there they remained as they had fallen. But he was no different in this respect from many other Spanish writers. Improvisation, whether it be detrimental or beneficial, is in evidence throughout Spanish literature. The average Spaniard does not reread, correct, and polish with the perseverance of the Frenchman.

Blasco Ibáñez was incapable of writing about the aristocracy because he was one of the people and knew them better than he knew the upper classes. He had to struggle too much to have any sympathy with the aristocratic class. He had been a political agitator, he had spent a part of his life in jail, he had been mortally wounded in fierce duels, he knew all the physical suffering that a man could bear, including that of great poverty. Furthermore, he was a real man. Part of a letter to his friend Cejador y Frauca is interesting:

"Yo me enorgullezco de ser un escritor lo menos literato posible; quiero decir lo menos profesional. Aborrezco a los que hablan a todas horas de su profesión y se juntan siempre con colegas, y no pueden vivir sin ellos, tal vez porque sustentan su vida mordiéndolos. Yo soy un hombre que vive y, además cuando le queda tiempo para ello, escribe por una necesidad imperiosa de su cerebro. Siendo así, creo proseguir la tradición española, noble y

1. Gasco Contell, Blasco Ibáñez, p. 141.

varonil. Los mejores genios literarios de nuestra raza fueron hombres, hombres verdaderos, fueron soldados, grandes viajeros, corrieron aventuras fuera de España, sufrieron cautividades y miserias..... y además escribieron. Cuando tuvieron que reñir a brazo partido con la vida, abandonaron la pluma, considerando incompatible la producción literaria con las exigencias de la acción."

He goes on to say that Cervantes once spent eight years without writing. Thus does one learn more about life than by spending one's days in the cafés, or by seeing it all through books.

In this same letter he declares that he wrote his novels of propaganda with sincerity. The country had just suffered a crushing defeat in one of its colonies. Spain was in a shameful condition and he roughly attacked, bringing to light some manifestations of apathy on the part of certain classes of people, thinking that this might serve as a reaction.

The following paragraph has more to do with his style and the element of emotion.

"Yo no creo que las novelas se hacen con la razón, con la inteligencia. La razón y la inteligencia intervienen en la obra artística, como directores y ordenadores. Tal vez ni siquiera dirigen ni ordenan, manteniéndose al margen del trabajo como simples consejeros. El constructor verdadero y único es el instinto, el subconsciente, las fuerzas misteriosas e invisibles que el vulgo rotula con el título de "inspiración". Un artista verdadero hace las mejores cosas porque sí, porque no puede hacerlas de otra manera."

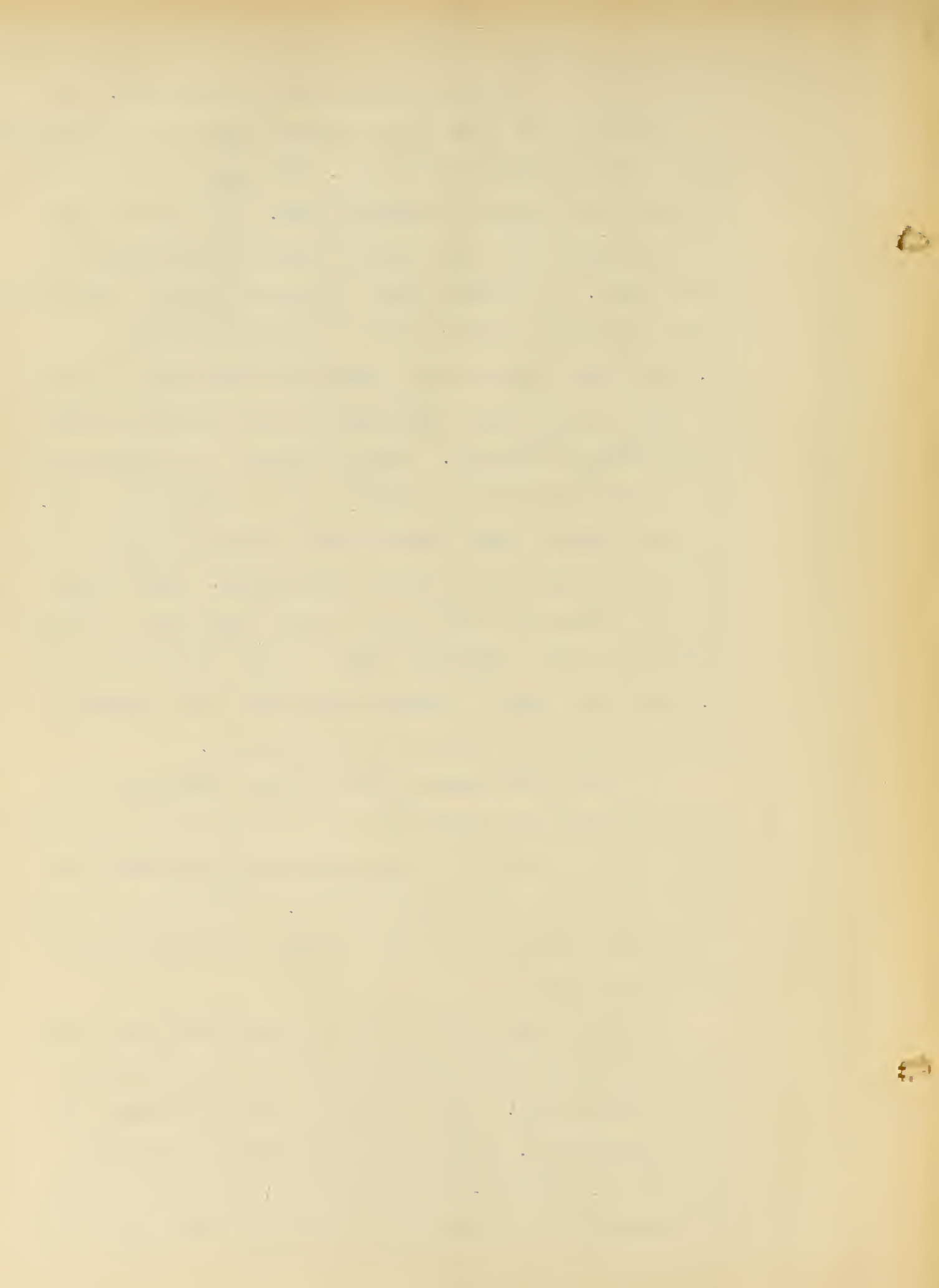
Blasco, of course, glorifies his anarchists. They have purposely been made brilliant while the rich

people and the religious fanatics have no champion. In all arguments that take place between people with conflicting ideas, the anarchists always win. The simple folk of the cathedral all look up to Gabriel Luna. He convinces his brother against his will that he should allow Sagrario to return home. In several other instances Gabriel "enlightens" people and gives them the truth on certain matters.

Dr. Aresti has given up his practice in the city to devote his life and knowledge unselfishly to aid the poor people in the mining districts. Sánchez Morueta is a millionaire but as compared with Dr. Aresti he is an uneducated fool. He knows nothing about the fine arts and in the end has to run to the church for spiritual protection. Long before that, Dr. Aresti had told him it would happen but he merely scoffed at such a ridiculous idea. Among other discussions Dr. Aresti has quite a bitter verbal duel with Urquiola, in which the doctor easily wins every point.

On the other hand why does Blasco Ibáñez make his radical characters exaggerated? At the end of "La Catedral", Gabriel Luna is killed by the people who have seized hold of his ideas and misinterpreted them. Is the writer afraid of the many things that he says against the church in the earlier chapters?

In "La Bodega" Salvatierra is explaining to a group of laborers what the society of the future will be like. No more oppressors! All the classes and professions are to be obliterated! There will be no priests, soldiers, politicians, lawyers--not even doctors! On the day when the revolution is to take place there will be no more sick-

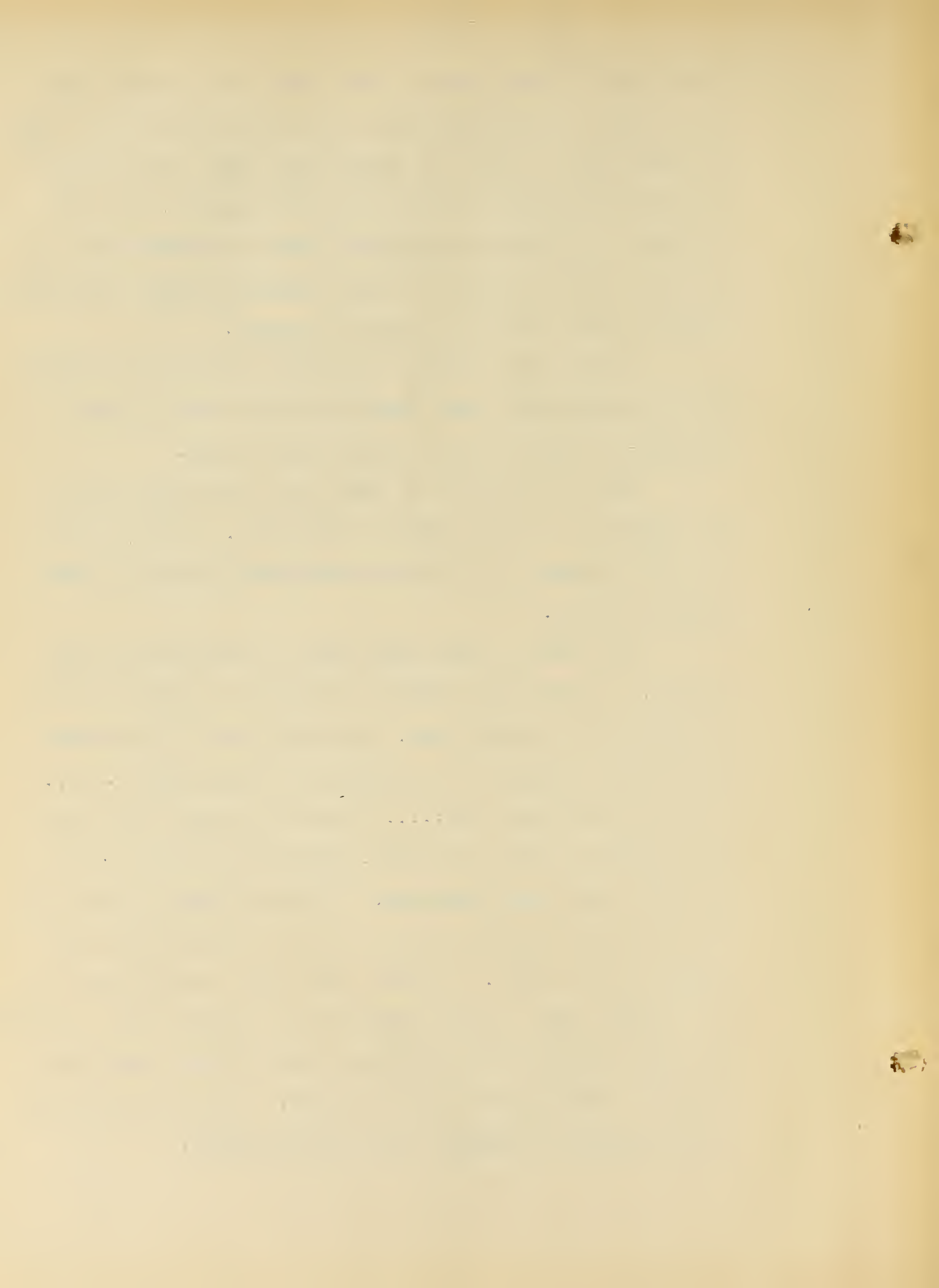


ness because those diseases that exist are brought about by a desire for ostentation on the part of the rich. They eat more than is good for themselves, while the poor man has scarcely enough to hold his body together. The new society, by dividing equally the means of subsistence, will do away with oversupply for some and undersupply for others which in turn will put an end to disease.

In the last chapter Salvatierra is let out of jail for the authorities know that he can not stir up more trouble--to such an extent has he lost favor.

When he turns up in Jerez, his old friends flee, not wishing to become bound by him again. Others regard him with hatred, as if he were responsible for all their present misery.

From time to time they look at the agitator insolently. An old liar, like all the rest of those who seek relief for the working man. Those who have followed his advice are rotting in the cemetery and there he is..... Less talk and more food..... They are clever, they have seen enough to know the truth, and they are with the one who will give them something. The real friend of the poor is the master with his wages; and if he gives wine with money, better still. Besides, what does the condition of the workers mean to that rascal who is dressed like a gentleman, even though his clothes are worn out like those of a beggar? His hands are not calloused. He wants to live at their expense; a sponger like so many others.



Why does Blasco have his anarchists lose favor like that? Is it fear or is it that he likes to have his fighters go down before the inevitable? Later in life when he becomes rich he does not have so much to say about social injustice. In those earlier days is he afraid to hear it said that he is an anarchist and is that the way he throws people off the trail? Or would not that have mattered to him?

It is difficult to know just how much influence these works of propaganda had on the Spanish people and how much they had to do with bringing about the revolution of 1931.

One critic laments the fact that Blasco is so well known in English-speaking countries to the exclusion of so many other Spanish novelists better deserving of recognition.¹ He refers, of course, to his later works. The English-speaking people do not know much about his works of propaganda. The same vigorous forcefulness, which catches the interest of the public, permeates his entire work. The translations of his stories are interesting despite the fact that he is crude and ungrammatical at times, that he may be commercial and too prolific, and that delicacy, finesse, and polish are not to be found in his writings. He himself declares:

"Cuanto mas sencillo es un autor menos esfuerzo cuesta su lectura. Por lo mismo procuro siempre escribir sin oropeles, retóricos, llanamente, con el propósito único de que el lector 'se olvide' de que está leyendo, y al terminar la última página le parezca que sale de un sueño, o que acaba de devanarse ante sus ojos una visión de cinematógrafo."²

The secret of the success of his books of propaganda

1. George Tyler Northup, An Introduction to Spanish Literature, p. 380.
2. Eduardo Zamacois, Mis Contemporáneos, p. 21.

lies in the appeal to the emotions. He is melodramatic and one may think that he is insincere. But he is not. He, like some other Spaniards, lived in Spain long enough to realize that the country was gagged. His initial motive is sincere. He wanted to disclose to his fellow Spaniards and to the rest of the world that Spain was under a yoke. He became a bit too enthusiastic and his emotions carried him to extremes. Whether or not this exaggeration is detrimental to the literary value of these five novels, the fact remains that he did his bit for the advent of republicanism. In fact he, a pen-fighter, did help do everything except wrest the monarchy from its throne by violence. He became the "portavoz" of the people and his greatest call was the direct attack on the king, "Una Nación Secuestrada".

He knew the Spanish people and he loved them. He loved Spain even after he had been banished and his property confiscated by the monarchy. But Alfonso and the rubbish that encircled him were all usurpers, with the interests of themselves at stake and not the interests of Spaniards at heart. Blasco preferred to live in France, for he had enough money to live like a lord even after his property was seized in Spain. He had already left that country before the monarchy had the "pleasure" of barring him.

Those who have extolled his Valencian novels have also lamented the fact that he left this field in which he was unrivalled to produce other works which lower his prestige. There are others who say that he was engaged in the wrong vocation. Instead of writing novels he should

have applied his talent to the production of the artistic and monumental album of Spanish regional life.

The revolution probably would have taken place just as soon if there had been no Blasco Ibáñez. Nevertheless, there was a Blasco Ibáñez, who appealed to other oppressed Spaniards by means of his novels bursting with propaganda and his simple forceful style and language that could be readily understood by the masses. It is only too evident that there was a demand at the time for men of his type, namely, pen-fighters. Spain did not have too many of them. His were passionate fiery books that loosed against the author the most violent censures. He was stigmatized as irreconcilable, as a fanatic and heretic. And what of it? The novelist launches himself violently against the power of the clergy which impoverishes nations and stifles initiative and independent thought and makes the pleasure of living disappear from the face of the earth, and he thunders against that abominable social institution that places the wealth of the world in the hands of a few and lets entire families die of hunger, of filth, and of cold on a land that, were it better cultivated, would be enough to furnish happiness for everybody.

Spain is now a Republic. The use for the "libros de combate", as Zamacois calls them, is not so great. They have not the literary value that the Valencian novels possess. People will read them but once for pleasure since they are interesting as propaganda but uninspiring as novels.

When Blasco Ibáñez died Spain lost a great contemporary warrior. It lost a real man, an adventurer. He was

as much at home on the other side of the globe as he was in his native city. His great experience in many and varied walks of life enabled him to be versatile and interesting. He was a champion of the Spanish people. It is small wonder that, on the last day of June, 1931, after the elections had taken place, the headline "Viva Blasco Ibáñez" appeared in large black type on the front page of "El Pueblo" in the streets of Valencia. "¡Sí, una vez más, miles de veces, siempre!" It is no wonder they call him "El Maestro Involvidable".

Blasco Ibáñez had become the writer of all Spain. After the Great War he became interested in a new field. The whole world was ready and waiting to give him other experiences and more material for books. He began to travel. He saw Europe. He lived in South America and began to write a series of "American" novels which he never finished. The war broke out and Blasco, always desirous to be near the center of action, went to Paris to live. His experiences enabled him to write three war novels, "Los Cuatro Jinetes del Apocolipsis", "Mare Nostrum", and "Los Enemigos de la Mujer". Formerly, he had employed all his literary skill to promote ideas of a Spanish revolution, the fall of the monarchy, and the advent of a republic; now he thundered against Prussian militarism, and praised the cause of the allies. By the end of the war Blasco had become popular especially in this country which he visited to give lectures. From then on Blasco was a changed man, even in appearance. His novels began to make money for him. "Los Cuatro Jinetes", "Sangre y Arena", and "Mare Nostrum" appeared in the movies.

He took a trip around the world. He turned his back on Spain and established himself in a palatial villa at the Riviera. He became fond of luxuries and enjoyed many conveniences that he never knew while in Spain. No longer did he turn out the good literary works of his younger days in Valencia. Furthermore, after becoming rich, his radical ideas were somewhat tempered. It cannot be said, however, that he did not remain a staunch defender of the Republican cause.

And so in this third literary period, Blasco Ibáñez became famous as an internationalist.

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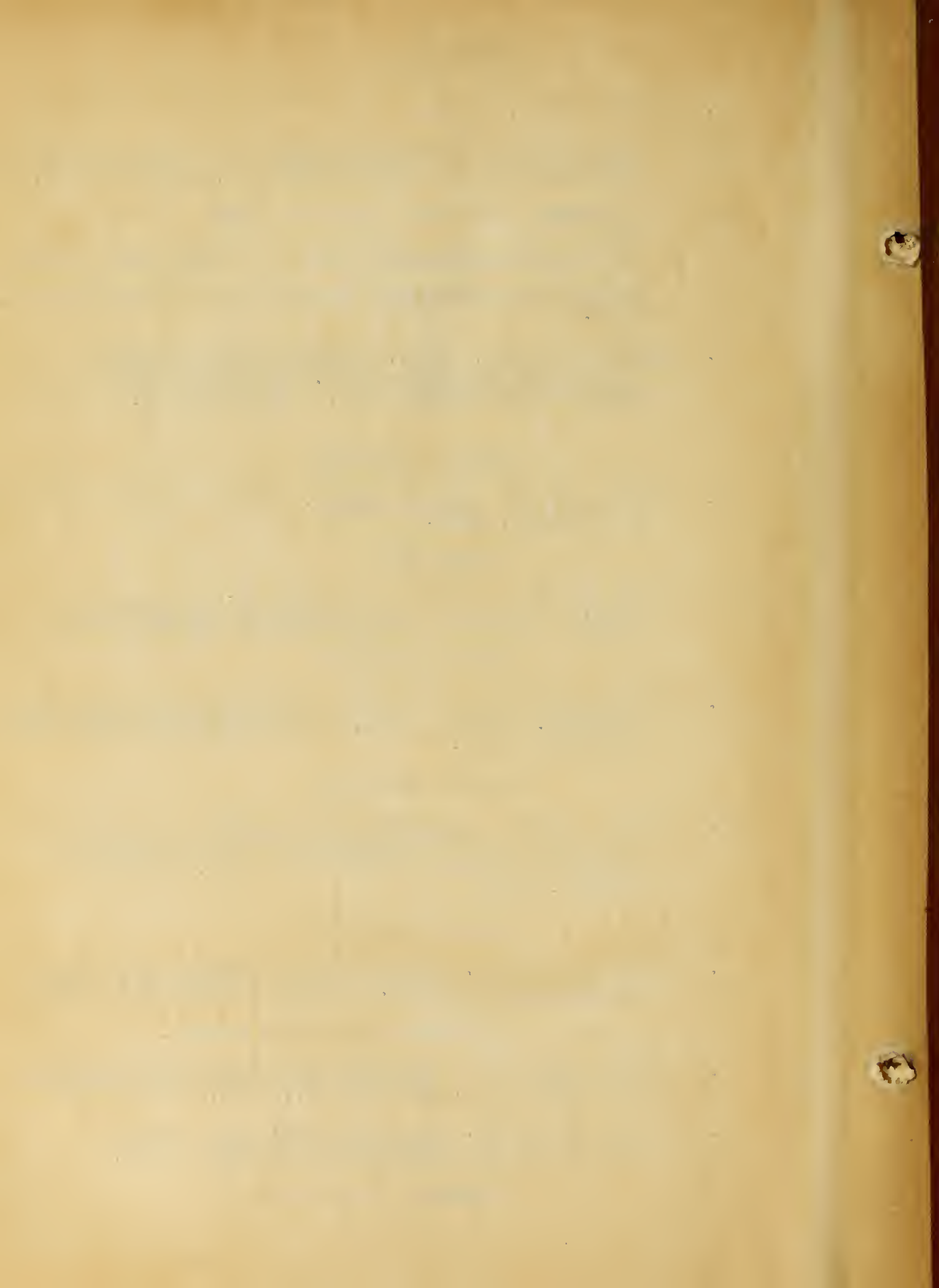
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